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The African-American Quarterback in Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education

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The African-American Quarterback in Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education

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Intercollegiate athletics have played a vital role in shaping social relationships in American society. In this capacity, however, predominantly white universities have been remiss in using sports to foster wholesome cross-racial relations among collegians. In some instances, universities have been participants in racially discriminatory practices on the gridiron, allocating positions in collegiate football on the basis of racial characteristics. The quarterback, as a prestigious position, has been reserved for white athletes, despite the increasing enrollments of African American athletes on predominantly white campuses. Administrators and coaches have legitimized these practices on a host of ideological generalizations or stereotypes (Williams and Yousef, 1979). Our research suggests that this trend seems to be reversing lately. While university administrators were tacit partners in the processes which formerly discouraged African-Americans as quarterbacks, some university officials now actively recruit them for that position.

Drawing upon sociological theories, our study explores these phenomena among the former Major Independent football teams, pointing out various factors which may be contributing to this changing trend of racial stratification and discrimination. Our content analyses of football media guides (1989-1994) and of legal decisions opening up the competitive processes in athletic administration offer hope for what seems to be a declining significance of race in intercollegiate football.

PRESENTERS

William B. Thomas received his Ph.D. from the University of Buffalo in 1977. A former Fulbright-Hays fellow to Denmark and Belgium, and a Visiting Fellow at the University of London (England), he is Professor of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. He teaches history and sociology of education in the Department of Administrative and Policy Studies. His research focus on social class, ethnicity, and education. Some of his publications appear in *American Educational Research Journal* and the *World Yearbook of Education*, 1992 and 1995.

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